

STATIN

FEB 1970

VIETNAM

U.S. fears of an offensive by liberation forces in South Vietnam continue to mount. Tad Szulc of the New York Times reported in the Jan. 30 edition that, according to U.S. intelligence sources, political officers among liberation military units are saying that "decisive blows" must be dealt against U.S. and Saigon troops. The same sources, presumably the CIA, also told Szulc, that the flow of "troops down the Ho Chi Minh Trail" has been 30,000 higher from October to now than during the same period a year earlier. The release of this "information" and numerous similar reports from the U.S. and Saigon military commands in South Vietnam reflect a real fear of a damaging offensive in South Vietnam. At the same time, the predictions appear to be self-serving pretexts to justify heavy U.S. bombing.

On Jan. 31-Feb. 1, the U.S. started up the bombing of North Vietnam again, carrying out the heaviest raids since last December. Such attacks could not possibly have a significant effect on an imminent offensive in South Vietnam and they may have increased in intensity, in yet another effort to force Hanoi to meet U.S. terms for a settlement. There have also been heavy U.S. bombings in the demilitarized zone and South Vietnamese central highlands by U.S. B-52s and fighter-bombers, with American aircraft dropping an estimated 700-900 tons of bombs on these areas Jan. 30-31, according to an AP report.

Testifying in Washington, following a recent visit to South Vietnam, Dr. E. W. Pfeifer of the University of Montana, stated that there are an estimated 23 million craters left from bombs dropped by B-52s in South Vietnam. The deep craters make land unsuitable for rice cultivation and fill up with water and provide "a perfect breeding ground for disease-bearing mosquitoes." Noting that 5.5 million acres of South Vietnamese forests were destroyed by chemical defoliation until it was halted eight months ago, Pfeifer reported that the U.S. now is destroying forests by bulldozers. Five U.S. companies, he said, using 150 tractors working from dawn to dusk, destroy about 1000 acres per day.

In the second of two articles on the My Lai massacre, Seymour Hersh wrote in the New Yorker that members of Army's Americal Division destroyed documents about the incident to protect officers involved. Basing his report on transcripts of the Army inquiry panel headed by Lt. Gen. William R. Peers, Hersh states that the Peers commission was unable to find how the My Lai 4 files had disappeared, although 400 witnesses were questioned. Peers suspected, according to Hersh, that the implicated officers themselves were among those responsible for the disappearance of the records. Furthermore, Hersh wrote, "The truth was more damaging to the Army's system than Peers could imagine: that subsequent officers of the Americal Division, who had no direct involvement with My Lai 4...had destroyed evidence to protect the officers who preceded them." Hersh also stated that at least one Saigon officer wrote a report that Americans had killed more than 400 persons in the My Lai area, and at the time American intelligence officers dismissed the report as "Vietcong propaganda."

LAOS

Heavy U.S. bombing attacks are continuing, augmented by air strikes by U.S.-supplied aircraft of the Saigon air force. It was officially admitted on Feb. 1 that Saigon planes have been bombing in Laos since December. In the ground fighting, at latest reports, the siege was continuing at the former secret CIA base at Long Chieng, south of the Plain of Jars. Pathet Lao forces have reportedly cut the road between Vientiane and the royal capital at Luang Prabang. The area of the royal capital was also said to be under attack by liberation forces....The official revelations of CIA-activity in Laos is considered part of an administration effort to get more funds for U.S. operations in Laos. Meanwhile, the numbers of Thai mercenaries being hired by the CIA to fight in Laos is steadily rising.